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ABSTRACT

Presented in this document is an overview of a Teacher Corps project undertaken by the Arlington, Virginia Public Schools and Trinity College, Washington, D.C., to develop a training complex in bilingual/multicultural education at Francis Scott Key Elementary School. The project is described as being an attempt to meet the needs of teachers, students, and a community with a large part of the population severely limited in English. Aspects of the project outlined include parent involvement, the training of bilingual interns, inservice instruction for Key teachers, language classes in Spanish, Korean and Vietnamese for students, and specific activities which paved the way for changes in the school. (EB)

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Achieving Multilingual Education In A Multicultural School: A Teacher Corps Model

The following is a paper based on a presentation at the 7th Annual International Bilingual/ Bicultural Education Conference, held April 24-28, 1978 at the Convention Center in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

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ACHIEVING MULTILINGUAL EDUCATION IN A MULTICULTURAL SCHOOL: A TEACHER CORPS MODEL

Liz Maxwell

Abstract Arlington (Virginia) Public Schools and Trinity College (Washington, D.C.) teamed up in a Teacher Corps Project at Key Elementary School to meet the needs of teachers, students and community, with a large part of the population severely limited in English. Areas of work: pre-service, inservice, instructional program for students, and parent involvement. Languages: Spanish, Korean and Vietnamese.

"How will they manage to pull that one off?" was the response of the program officer when he read our proposal. He was not alone in wondering how we would ever accomplish our grand project goals in the space of two years: start up bilingual education where it had scarcely been heard of, and in Spanish, Korean and Vietnamese; train brand new teacher-interns, provide inservice to experienced teachers, and involve unsuspecting parents in it all.

Funding from Teacher Corps went to Arlington (Virginia) Public Schools and Trinity College of Washington, D.C. in June, 1976. The grant was for a training complex in bilingual/multicultural education, based at Francis Scott Key Elementary School.

Arlington was a likely setting for this kind of project. With the rapid influx of immigrants moving there, more and more children whose native language was not English had been entering the public schools. About one out of five students were of a linguistic minority, with 73 languages represented!

Key School was selected because out of its 600 students, 40% were non-native speakers of English. In this one school alone, there were representatives of 31 different nationalities and 25 languages. By far the largest language group after English was Spanish, followed by Vietnamese and Korean. Many children came to Key with little or no English proficiency. A few had been able to catch up but others were limping farther and farther behind each year.

Trinity College was ideally suited to be the institution of higher education involved in this project. Trinity had a specialized M.A.T. program in bilingual/multicultural education, a program which won an award in 1974 for outstanding achievement from the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education.

First Year. An unused classroom served as the Teacher Corps Office at Key. There were sixteen of us on staff, from eleven distinct cultural groups. Each person was bilingual in English and either Spanish, Vietnamese, Korean, Pilipino, Chinese or French. With our combined linguistic skills and experience in education, it was not long before we were being called upon to

provide all sorts of help in communicating with students and parents, and interpreting the inevitable dilemmas in which people find themselves in cross-cultural situations.

It took about a year for Key School faculty and us to adapt to our huge presence in the building, a presence that in itself was an unspoken demand that attention be paid to minority children. It required that each cultural group respect and appreciate the others.

For the principal the blessings we brought were counter-balanced with increased problems that come with increased personnel. There were touchy situations of school-versus-project jurisdiction, especially with parent involvement. There were tensions among some parents and teachers whose traditional view of public schools did not include what the project was trying to do. They often felt threatened.

Within the project staff itself there were a few interpersonal problems caused by cultural differences. Yet we knew we could be effective only as a team. With the help of a psychologist we had teaming meetings once a week for six weeks. We were able to surface our feelings. We began to appreciate our similarities more than our differences. Above all, we learned the strength of each one's good will in wanting the project to succeed, and from that point on there was no stopping us.

Parent Involvement. With time, relationships with parents developed under the nurturance of our bilingual community coordinators. We learned how responsive parents are when communication is in a language they can understand. Having baby sitters during meetings was another cultural adaptation. Many of our parents do not go out except for work, without their children. For them to hire someone for an evening of child care is unthinkable if not economically impossible.

Once they got used to participation in Key School meetings, many non-English speaking parents (most with very little formal education) braved meetings of the school board and the county board. They even spoke at the podium with the help of interpreters. (We silently cheered!)

Some parents who spoke only English became suspicious of anything said in another language; some grumped that it was unpatriotic. Others sincerely welcomed the chance for their youngsters to learn alongside children from all parts of the globe.

Preservice. Our four bilingual interns had the challenge of earning an M.A.T. degree plus certification as teachers, while at the same time working with Key teachers in the classroom and with parents in the community. Though all of the interns had a bachelor's degree, none had had previous education courses. Several needed undergraduate credits in English, history and

math. Needless to say, they walked a strict time line.

Inservice. Key teachers were typical of most urban school teachers. They were dedicated, but with little or no formal preparation for the diversity of children coming to them with degrees of proficiency in English varying from zero on up. But language was not the only problem. The possibility of misinterpreting behavior was enormous. (For example, a pat on the head. Vietnamese do this only to an animal, never to a person.)

Before anything else we conducted a needs assessment. What did the teachers feel they needed most help with? They listed these as top priorities for inservice:

1. teaching reading to non-native speakers of English
2. individualizing instruction in a multilingual, multicultural classroom
3. beginning Spanish language for classroom use
4. using bilingual aides and volunteers for bilingual support in a regular classroom
5. special education for non-native speakers of English

We had the familiar inservice problems of finding time slots suitable for teachers to have classes, and of making realistic course requirements. To offset these problems we managed to have some courses worked out with the teacher while actually on the job in the classroom, with a one-to-one inservice

instructor. Most of the courses and workshops were conducted on site by project staff, with the help of outside consultants and school system specialists.

The inservice program, designed with teacher input, was to develop in teachers a greater understanding of the needs of language minority children -- why they do what they do and respond the way they do, and in what situations learning best takes place.

Language Classes. Aware of what a valuable resource our staff was, the principal invited us to teach language classes to the children. They could choose Spanish, Korean or Vietnamese, with the permission of their parents. Classes were from twenty to thirty minutes, four days a week. Teacher Corps staff used native music, art and food to help popularize these classes. There were some noted changes: fewer school absentees and fewer overt signs of shame over being culturally different. There was a greater show of interest in other cultures and of pride in one's own language.

Institutional Change Through Activities. By means of many activities with children, parents and teachers our project staff paved the way for some very real changes in the school. These were some of our specific activities:

For and With Children: Ongoing teaching of songs, dances and art activities from many lands; celebrations of the Vietnamese

Lantern Festival and New Year; family field trips; Korean Saturday school; health education (Spanish); kindergarten screening (Spanish); bilingual tutoring and group work; six weeks' bilingual summer school (Spanish, Korean, Vietnamese).

For and With Parents: Orientation to the public school system and Key School in parents' native language; GED classes, classes in cooking, nutrition and sewing, leadership training workshop, all in Spanish; income tax preparation (Spanish, Korean, Vietnamese); consumer education (Korean); Vietnamese community center, open to all.

For Teachers: Twelve inservice courses for graduate credit, including language classes for teachers; workshops; demonstration classes; language dominance testing of students; interpreting and translating.

Curriculum: We produced the following for dissemination: Spanish-English kindergarten curriculum; language dominance tests in Korean and Vietnamese; tapes of multicultural songs and dances; Korean and Vietnamese language arts teachers' guides; text for teaching basic Vietnamese to classroom teachers; multicultural units for classroom use.

In two intensely active years our Teacher Corps Project did "manage to pull it off". The institution has changed. Key teachers are increasingly turning their classrooms into multicultural learning arenas. A bilingual program with Title VII

help is underway in grades one and two and will expand to grade three. More bilingual staff will be hired. Communication with parents in their own language will continue. As Teacher Corps time at Key nears an end, a climate of acceptance has begun. People have been challenged to consider new education alternatives, develop new skills, deepen their understanding. In a word -- to stretch. As for the staff, we stretched too, and we're pleased with what we accomplished.

(If you have specific questions regarding this project, write to Liz Maxwell, 6130 30th St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20015)